



## **PRIORITY OF PEOPLE OVER PROPERTY**

### **MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE SERIES**

Many of our multi-congregational churches exist in the city. God has made us caretakers of Creation. Cities (and the people in them) occupy a special place in Scripture and Creation. This is an argument for returning to a parish mentality where the church takes responsibility for the neighborhood, not just the individuals who have historically attended the church.

# PRIORITY OF PEOPLE OVER PROPERTY

## MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE SERIES

### CREATION

- God created and it is good.
  - We are especially aware of God's creation in nature.
  - "How Great Thou Art" echoes the wonders of God's creative prowess.
  - Does the creation theme sparkle in an urban environment?
- Did God make the city?
  - Ray Bakke argues for a theology of the city in which he finds cities playing a prominent role in Scripture including the Holy City and the New Jerusalem.
  - A theology of creation has implications for Christian environmentalism, including in the city.

**Note:** When we lived near downtown Los Angeles, one day Janet was taking a walk in the city with our daughter, Robyn, who at the time was pre-school age. It was a hot, summer day, and the traffic on the streets was heavy as cars jammed the roads and buses belched out their thick black smoke. Robyn, our resident philosopher, in a moment of deep thought asked Janet if God made everything. Janet, of course, responded, "Yes". Robyn then asked, "Did He make all of this" (looking at the buildings, the phone lines, the sidewalks, the asphalt and the cars around her)?

Janet wisely responded that God had indeed made everything and that people had used some of what God made to build the city. To which Robyn asked, "Do you suppose this is what He had in mind?"

**DR. RON  
BENEFIEL,  
DEAN OF THE  
SCHOOL OF  
THEOLOGY AND  
CHRISTIAN  
MINISTRY, POINT  
LOMA NAZARENE  
UNIVERSITY**

This material was  
originally titled, *A  
Theology of Place.*

## MEMORY

- Places become sacred as they are places where we remember when God met us, provided for us, and intervened on our behalf.
- The idea of altars or monuments in the Scriptures.
  - The Crossing of the Jordan.
  - The Mount of Transfiguration.
  - The Temple (II Chronicles).

**Note:** In the discussion of the possibility of the relocation of headquarters and the seminary, Alex Deasley wrote a response in which he talked about the seminary campus as a sacred place. It is sacred as it symbolizes the spiritual formation that took place in thousands of students over the years.

For multi-congregational ministry, this can become counterproductive as old timers are reluctant to welcome people in who do not share or fully appreciate their stories of the place.

## PREVENIENT GRACE AND THE IDEA OF PARISH

- An extension of the idea of prevenient grace is the idea that God is active and present in the world.
- For John Wesley, the world was his parish. This led him out of the sacred sanctuaries of the Anglican Church into the fields to preach to the masses.
- One idea of parish ministry is the idea that the Church has a responsibility for the well-being of the neighborhood.
- Gibson Winter, "The Suburban Captivity of the Church" contrasts Protestant with Catholic churches.
  - Protestant emphasis on individualism results in inviting similar culture individuals into the church.
  - Catholic emphasis on community results in the church's participation in and responsibility for the neighborhood. As neighborhoods change, Catholic churches stay while Protestant churches move to the suburbs.

**Note:** One of the essential philosophical shifts for us in the development of our multi-congregational ministry in Los Angeles was to embrace a parish mentality of ministry.

## REDEEMING THE PLACE

- Romans 8 speaks of the whole Creation waiting for the final day.
- The idea of the Church as salt and light. Not only prophetic witness, but change agent.
  - The story of Hope Center in Westport. The building formerly housed an abortion clinic, now it is a place of Christian worship.
  - Los Angeles after the riots.....what do we do now? Plant a garden!!!!
  - Because this is God's land, and we are God's people, we do not abandon the land, rather we inhabit the land and redeem the place.

# KINGDOM METAPHORS FOR MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY

**Philippians 2:** Have the same attitude which was in Christ Jesus in which in the Incarnation, He fully engaged the complexity, uncertainty, and diversity of the world in order to offer the hope of redemption.

**Ephesians 2:** On the Cross, Jesus took the alienation between us all into Himself. As a result, the Church is to be a place of reconciliation and unity.

**Pentecost:** As the Church consists of and includes people from every tribe and nation and all social classes, it is a prophetic witness of the already/not yet Kingdom.

**Revelation 7 v 9 - 10:** "After I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the Throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands and they cried in a loud voice...Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the Throne and to the Lamb."

## CONCLUSION

The call of the Church is to be fully present and engaged in the world, as it is God's creation. It is to be fully present and engaged with the people of the world as they are created in God's image and are the objects of God's love.

It is to follow Christ in being incarnationally present in the world, even if that calls us in ways that are contrary to our social and economic impulses and preferences.

As people of the Kingdom, we are to be agents of reconciliation, justice, peace and hope. Rather than the traditional images of white flight, God calls us to participate with Him in the work of redemption in the world. Further, the call of the Church is to redemption of the places themselves, the social structures and environments in which we live.